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SUBJECT: Canadians to offer Father Ly a home in Canada

1.(SBU) Canadian Ambassador Horton told the Ambassador December 16 that Canada would offer Father Ly a home in Canada, if the GVN were to release him from prison. Canadian Political Counselor Rob Burley told Political Chief the following day that two Canadian ministers - including the Foreign Minister - were extremely concerned about Father Ly's well-being following his second stroke, and had instructed the Canadian Embassy to convey the offer. Burley asked for our assistance in conveying the offer, noting the Canadian Embassy never had visited Father Ly in prison and did not have contact with his family members. The Embassy agreed and, after securing the agreement of Father Ly's family, put the Canadian embassy in touch with two of Father Ly's nephews. Burley confirmed later December 17 that his Embassy had spoken with Father Ly's family, and that one of Father Ly's family members had agreed to convey Canada's offer to Father Ly during their next prison visit, which could be as early as the weekend of December 19-20. Burley added that Ambassador Horton had requested a meeting with MFA/IO Director General Trung to inform Vietnam of Canada's offer and, if Father Ly accepts, request that he be released.

2.(SBU) During a working lunch with MFA/Americas Director General Nguyen Ba Hung December 17, the DCM reiterated the USG's request that Father Ly be released on humanitarian grounds, and expressed disappointment that the Ambassador had not been permitted to visit Father Ly since he suffered his second stroke. Ba Hung said the GVN likely would extend an amnesty right before Tet, as is customary, but stressed that Father Ly would not be considered for inclusion on the list unless he did "something big" to apologize for his actions.

3.(SBU) Comment: We doubt the GVN will respond positively to Canada's request. The GVN does not have a track record of responding positively to such requests. Furthermore, no Vietnamese leader wants to appear to be bowing to foreign pressure or "soft" on individuals who they consider pose a threat to Vietnam's national security, especially as preparations for the January 2011 Party Congress intensify. Sure, Father Ly's continued imprisonment causes the GVN some headaches in their dealings with the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, with the EU. But Father Ly's freedom and relocation to Canada - where he would enjoy an open, global stage to criticize the GVN and the CPV - could cause the Vietnamese leadership more headaches. Even if the GVN were to agree to Canada's request, absent a major downturn in his health that could not be addressed in Vietnam, we doubt Father Ly would accept the offer, given his oft-stated love for his homeland and desire to remain here - imprisoned or not.
Michalak